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Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics

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HOW FURTHER MAY WE DEVELOP OUR RURAL YOUTH WORK
IN THE UNITED STATES *

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Since 1914, we have enrolled over 5,000,000 rural boys and girls 10 to 20 years of age in 4-H club work. In 1932, membership in club work averaged $2\frac{1}{2}$ years. Of the enrollment at that time of 925,712, about 31.6 percent, or over 292,000 boys and girls, were 15 years of age and above. These numbers are impressive. They show that we are now in extension reaching and influencing a substantial number of older rural youth. When compared with the approximately 10,000,000 rural youth in the United States 15 to 24 years of age, however, we see that extension is reaching annually less than 3 percent of this older rural-youth group, and has quite a way to go if it hopes to touch and influence any large proportion of the group.

4-H club work, as it is now organized and conducted, is one of the great educational movements of the world. Our first task is to keep it strong and growing and to push still further its ideals of accomplishment, character, and culture. We should be enrolling, eventually, at least a million and a half of rural youth each year, holding them in club work at least 3 years. This accomplishment is within sight and within probability. We are not unaware of the fact, however, that in club work, as in Scout work, in church work, and in the schools, and as has been pointed out by previous speakers at this conference, we lose many of our club members at the ages of 15 and 16 and above. They drop out and we lose track of them till we finally find them again, farming somewhere, and a part of our farm bureaus or adult county extension organization later in life.

What has happened in between? Evidently our 4-H club program hasn't quite met their need. Something is wanting. Can we find that something and supply it, and is it within our province as an extension agency to undertake it?

Under the law governing us, we are concerned in all matters affecting agriculture and rural home making in the broadest sense. That includes rural economics and rural sociology as well as technic in agricultural production and homemaking.

* Given at National 4-H Club Camp Leaders' Conference, Washington, D. C. June 19, 1934.

DISTRIBUTION: A copy of this circular has been sent to each State extension director, State leader in county agricultural and in home demonstration work, specialist in rural sociology, State agricultural-college library, and experiment-station library.

Right at this time, there is a need for helping our older rural youth who are out of school to find jobs and earn money. Extension may not be able to help much in finding or creating paying jobs for rural youth just now. That is not quite our field. Other departments of government are concerned in this matter. We will help all we can; but, while these older youth are waiting for jobs or are at home with their parents, we may give them some outlook on life, some orientation as to life jobs, some mental stimulus, recreational and social activities, that may help in keeping them in a wholesome frame of mind and encourage their patience. These are matters which are in the extension field and which we should follow up.

The reports which you have sent in to us and which have been summarized by Mr. Merritt, show that many of you are already not only fully aware of the larger field awaiting extension with this older group of youth, but many already are at work in the field. Whenever you are satisfied with the work you are doing, we would not have you change it, but rather continue and enlarge it. It is not necessary that we do all our work alike in the United States. We don't want to be standardized. We grow, as all people grow, by testing out new and untried ways, and that should be our attitude with this older group of rural youth in the United States.

Let us keep the older youth, who has found satisfaction in project and leadership work, in our 4-H clubs as long as he or she finds satisfaction and growth there. Contest and prize winners and those given larger projects and partnership with father or mother and some leadership work, are in this group; but, for those who drop out of our present 4-H club work or who may never have been in it but still feel the need of some guidance in life, some form of extension work may be needed. And it is this possible additional supplemental form of extension that we would consider with you this morning.

First, what is the need beyond a job and earning money; what concerns youth most at 16 to 24 years of age and above? It is the age of restlessness, the age of adventure, of desire to travel, to follow the long trail, to see, to explore, to find out for one's self. It is the age of high emotion, of growing interest in the opposite sex. It is the age of increasing independence of parental and teacher authority, of desire to be one's own boss. It is the age of exploration of one's own mind as to one's beliefs. It is the age that responds to patriotic appeal, to high ideals of service. It often is the most difficult age to deal with, either in the home or the school, and yet it is the age when life choices are made as to a mate, as to one's life work, as to one's spiritual outlook, and when life's ideals are being set up. It is an extremely important age.

If the youth chooses wisely as to a mate, a calling, and life's ideals, he fulfills life's purpose, adds to the welfare of the nation, and finds joy and happiness all along the way. If he doesn't choose wisely of these things, discontent and sorrow may be his portion to the end of the journey. The question is, can extension help in this difficult period? We are helping many now; can we contribute to rural youth welfare and satisfaction still more by larger effort - an effort especially designed to reach this particular group? I think

we can and should, and that the time is here when we should go definitely forward in this field - at first experimentally, as we are doing now, feeling our way but with faces set toward a goal and gathering definiteness and strength as we go, until finally the movement becomes a powerful influence in the welfare and guidance of rural youth of all United States and the Territories beyond.

What are some of the features that should obtain in this work with older rural youth? As we view the matter, any extension organization of rural youth may well be made up of both boys and girls in one organization. They are deeply interested in each other. Culturally, they need each other's society. They are looking for a life mate. We may well give them a chance to get acquainted with each other under wholesome surroundings, and in the process help to set up in their minds ideals of conduct and character, the qualities that make for success and happiness in life's journey together.

All rural youth of wholesome character should, in our thinking, be invited into the membership of these rural-youth organizations, whether they ever have been in 4-H clubs or not, and whether they are in school or out of school. If older 4-H club members want to join this older rural-youth organization, they should be encouraged to do so. Such members would help to leaven the whole group and set up desirable ideals in the organization.

We think the program of the organization set up for rural youth should be determined largely and made out largely by rural youth themselves, with some guidance from the agricultural college through extension and other educational forces. We should, however, help them set up such standards at the outset as will appeal to the mind and spirit, as well as to the material.

Under our present laws, we are justified in promoting such an enterprise with older rural youth, and with public moneys, only as it has a distinct relation to agriculture, home economics, and rural life. These should constitute the cornerstones from which we start if we are to use present cooperative extension moneys in their execution.

In this extension enterprise with older rural youth, I doubt if we should insist on project work as we do in the 4-H clubs. Let that be a distinct feature of 4-H club work. This older group that is largely outside our present fold and which we desire to reach, is not for the most part greatly interested in projects but seeks, rather, orientation, guidance, inspiration, ways of service, and social life. We must meet these needs if we are to interest and hold this group. If it seems desirable to have projects, they should be of substantial magnitude and content, such as to challenge their attention, and probably should be in the field of economics, sociology, rural culture and community service.

In our way of thinking, therefore, part of each monthly program of this older group, say a fourth to a third, might well be given to subject matter that informs and guides - such topics as Farming as a Life Work, The Outlook in Agriculture, What Constitutes a Country Home, Rural Family Relationships, Art

in Agriculture, Research in Agriculture, The Use of Money and Credit in Agriculture, Cultural Advantages of Farm Life, Agriculture in the Economy of the Nation, and many kindred matters that occur to you might well be considered. These are topics that, when well presented, might serve to inform, inspire, and develop in rural youth pride of occupation and interest in home and government.

Music, particularly group singing, supplemented with choruses, glee clubs, quartets, and instrumental music, might well be a part of every monthly program. Debates, essays, readings, poetry, matters that give each member of the group a chance to express himself, might well constitute a part of the program of such a rural-youth organization. Plays, drama, and pageantry should have their place. Then, as a part of each monthly program, we would propose recreation in all its various forms, including games, folk dancing, and above all would we encourage meetings, given over occasionally or especially arranged, for hiking, the mapping and following of nature trails, the study of birds, and of plant and animal life. If these clubs did nothing but implant in the soul of each member a love of nature, the woods, the fields, streams, summer rain, growing corn, rainbow, and sunset, they would be worth all the effort we might put into them.

We know a church in this city where every Sunday at 3 o'clock, winter and summer, the young people start for a hike, returning for a 25-cent supper at the church. That is doing much to hold the young people together. There should be a fire and eats somewhere along the way in group hiking, which is just as interesting in winter, with snow and ice, as in summer, with growing crops and still waters.

"They wandered away and away
With Nature, that dear old nurse,
And she sang to them night and day
The songs of the Universe.

"And whenever the way seemed long
Or their hearts began to fail,
She would sing a more wonderful song
Or tell a more marvelous tale."

"Nature never did betray the heart that loved her;
'Tis her privilege through all the years
Of this our life
To lead from joy to joy."

"Touched by a light that hath no name,
A glory never sung,
Aloft on sky and mountain wall
Are God's great pictures hung."

And so would we have hiking and nature study and nature appreciation in our rural-youth monthly programs - something for the mind, something for the body, something for the spirit, something sober, something joyous, something inspirational. Along with subject matter in agriculture and home economics, and songs and readings, instrumental music and plays, debates, dramatics, pageantry, and games, would be folk dancing, story telling, lectures on etiquette and behavior, and whatever other things the groups might find of interest to them.

To convey in the title what these rural youth clubs, in a measure, should, in our mind, cover, they might well be called Rural Youth Study and Social Clubs, or Rural Youth Farm and Home Clubs, or be given some other title that would show their serious as well as recreational and social aspect. The term, "Young Farmers' Club" has been suggested and has its advantages.

At this time we think the organization of such clubs might be on a community basis, making the community large enough so that there might be from 30 to 50 or more members in each group, fairly well divided in numbers between the sexes. The clubs should be large enough so that, with good programs, a fairly large attendance might be assured at each meeting. Larger attendance is desirable because it gives an opportunity for more contacts and friendships, and these are needs and objectives of the group at this age.

Stating the matter more concisely, we think work with the older group of rural youth should concern itself -

First, with orientation as to agriculture and homemaking in their broadest sense. What is there in agriculture, financially, educationally, and culturally, as compared with other vocations and professions? We should help youth with facts and figures, tours and examples, so that they may choose their life work intelligently and with a prospect of having enough to eat and wear, to educate their children, and live becomingly.

Second, youth is interested in developing its personality and choosing its life mate. In these fields, some guidance from our rural sociologists and club leader might be available, as well as from those of the community who had developed successful homes and family and community relationships. Youth is intensely interested in these two fields.

Third, youth, along with those of other ages, desires an opportunity to express itself - therefore, the place of music, singing, reading, debate, drama, handicraft, painting and modeling, recreation, games, camps, etc., in any organization of rural youth that we may encourage.

Fourth, youth craves knowledge and culture, adventure and travel. Hence, we should encourage youth in organized reading and review of literature, nature study and hikes, personal observation, writing,

travel individually and in groups as youth does in Germany, and be a continuing influence to keep them in school or send them to college or into the educational and cultural fields for which they are best fitted.

There may be other matters that we have forgotten in this list of interests of rural youth. You will know what to add to them.

Now, a word as to the possible mechanics of organization. We like the Canadian idea, brought to us by Director Whitelock of Canada, and also outlined to us by our Mr. W. A. Lloyd, who visited Canada several years ago on a study of the very matter we are considering this morning, and who has published a report of his findings, with which many of you are familiar. Canada, we have learned, begins by assembling the youth in a 1 to 3-month school and giving them high-grade work in agriculture or home economics for the period, forming the association at the end of the period out of the youth who attend these schools.

Canada, we have learned, has separate organizations for the older boys and girls, who, we understand, have occasional joint meetings for joint programs. For the purposes in mind, outlined here, we believe we might well combine the sexes in one organization. For our purposes, also, we might limit the extension school or institute to approximately 2 weeks in length. The institute would be designed wholly for older rural youth, and have something of a farmers' institute character.

The large purpose of the institute would be to give them something practical and worth while by the best talent we could get from the agricultural college -- extension specialists and State leaders, Smith-Hughes teachers, and county extension agents -- and elsewhere during the 2 weeks they were assembled. This extension school or institute would serve to bring the group together and get them acquainted with each other. Once or twice during the 2-week extension school, an evening literary, music, play, debate, and recreation program might be put on that would serve still further to bring the group together and get them acquainted with each other in a social way and with each other's talents and capabilities. The school might wind up with a high-grade banquet, followed by the organization of a permanent Rural Youth Farm and Home Club, or Rural Youth Study and Social Club, or whatever name you chose to adopt.

The group thus formed would need a little help in shaping up their first program or two, following organization, so that they might have a demonstration of what constitutes a high-grade program. It should be organized largely from local talent from within the club, but with an occasional speaker from the outside to assure a broad viewpoint and touch with the world of thought. Then they should be left free to elect their own officers, appoint their own committees, develop their own programs, and manage their own affairs, with occasional visits from extension forces to learn how they might be of further help, and to furnish the group with such suggestions as would keep their programs interesting and helpful, and to continue to follow up each group.

Under whose auspices should these extension schools and older rural-youth organizations be set up and guided? The extension director in each State, if he favored the plan, would know best. In our thinking, this phase of extension would make progress only as someone was put especially in charge of it and the work closely coordinated with, if not made a definite part of, club work. The one in charge of the work, however, would have to be close enough to the director so that he or she could call on any talent within the institution in organizing and conducting the preliminary extension schools in institutes and giving follow-up guidance to the clubs. The teachings of the whole agricultural college in all its fields should find expression and application in these clubs.

In the counties, the county agents - agricultural, home demonstration, and club - normally would be the group that would determine whether they thought it advisable to start such work in their county, and they would make the preliminary arrangements. They have the organization back of them, the staff and outlook to do the job should they choose to undertake it.

In the work, extension should seek the cooperation and assistance of Smith-Hughes forces located in the counties. Smith-Hughes forces are as much interested in this older group of rural youth outside the school, or inside, as is extension. We have said too little about this group in this paper; but in our thinking they should be a cooperating partner in the enterprise.

May we make it clear also, that there is no expectation or desire on our part that the suggestions we offer this morning for extension rural-youth clubs be looked upon other than as suggestions for those who now have no special work planned for this older group. If you have something started and are satisfied with it, keep on with what you have. We do believe, however, that these clubs should be liberal enough in their membership to include those who may never have been in our 4-H clubs. There are so many of them, and the provision should be made so that both boys and girls could, at least occasionally, be brought together in serious as well as recreational and social relationships. We like the idea followed in Hawaii of having the boys take charge of one monthly program and the girls the next, thus giving variety in the programs and an opportunity for all to have a part.

Moreover, we would not have anyone look upon the suggestions made this morning as other than something to be tried out tentatively and experimentally, in a State here and there perhaps and a county here and there, where conditions seem promising.

Our agricultural colleges, you know, started just one at a time, here and there in the United States. Our experiment stations did the same, one here, one there, over the country. Extension itself developed on the same basis. One State did a little extension work, then another, here and there, and they continued this way until the college, the station, extension, all proved themselves good, each in its respective sphere. Then along came Federal laws and substantial finances and made each, the college, the experiment station, the Extension Service, Nation-wide in every State and every Territory of the Union. So would we have

Rural-Youth Study and Social Clubs, Rural Youth Farm and Home Clubs or Young Farmers' Clubs, organized and developed throughout the United States; first, try out and be sure we are right, then go ahead.

We are aware that to develop the work with older rural-youth groups, should we enter this field in any adequate way, would call for additional finances not now in sight. Let's not worry about that just now; but, whenever it seems desirable and feasible, try out something, either along the lines here suggested or something that appeals to you more. If we do something potentially worth while for this group of 10,000,000 rural youths, ways will be found for financing it. The United States has a way of doing the thing it wants to do, if it is something the Nation needs and desires.

In closing this paper, I would leave these things on your minds:

Our first duty is to our 4-H clubs as they are now organized or may be improved. They constitute a going concern. They are accomplishing worthwhile results. They have the love of their membership and the respect and good will of the Nation. We must make them still stronger, still more effective. They are to agriculture and rural life what the Sunday school is to the church.

We are justified in taking up new work with older groups only as we are certain that in so doing we do not neglect the 4-H club work already started. There is, however, a large extension field with our older rural youth groups which we as yet barely are touching. It is a challenging field because it is made up of awakening and inquiring and restless minds. The reports from many States show that extension already is entering this field and accomplishing much. Our counsel is to take the matter up with your director and see whether conditions in your State justify any larger entrance into this field, now or in the future, and if so how to go about it. Our hope is that each State may enter the field, to a limited extent, experimentally, a community in a county here and there, as conditions warrant. Out of all our experimenting of the present and within the next few years, we may find the way to larger effort and accomplishment, as we have in 4-H club work.

Orientation and guidance of rural youth in the technic, the statesmanship, and the culture of agriculture and home economics would seem to constitute the purpose and the justification of extension's entering this field. By-products of these things are the opportunity given youth to express itself, to get acquainted with itself, to learn the courtesies and amenities of life, to sing, to play, to debate, to study nature, to find companionship, to give service, to live. A larger part of ten million youth would be helped to see further, to enjoy the world and their fellow men more through membership and participation in such clubs.

We believe the clubs should be organized with both boys and girls in their membership; that the clubs should contain 30 to 50 or more boys and girls, enough to insure rather wide acquaintanceship and the possibility for each to find within the club some congenial companionship.

That the clubs should be initiated or proposed by extension and help be given in organization and starting, but made self-propelling at the earliest possible date, with the largest freedom given the group for self-expression and self-control.

That the program should be based on orientation in agriculture and home economics in their widest economic, social, character-building, and statesmanship aspects. That a fourth to a third of each monthly program should be given to the serious informing, orienting matter and the remainder to recreation, social, and cultural matters.

That nature study and contact with nature through purposeful hiking jaunts and vacation camps be a liberal part of the season's program.

We believe that an effective way of developing and organizing the clubs is through 2-week farm and home institutes that would serve to bring interested youths together where they could get acquainted with each other and start off with an understanding of each other's characteristics and abilities and an impetus that would assure a large measure of future success.

We believe every effort should be made to secure the cooperation and assistance of Smith-Hughes forces in the development of these rural-youth clubs. Their future farmers, as well as our older 4-H club members would serve as wonderful leavening for the new group, and the influence on rural life of both extension and Smith-Hughes forces would be greatly enlarged by this cooperation and expansion.

The whole extension force of the college, including instructors, research workers, and heads of departments, would have to be called upon and take part in the work if the results we want to see come out of it are to be attained.

Experience thus far indicates that work with the older group is more costly than 4-H club work; but, if it can be made worth while for this older group, the Nation will welcome it and ways will be found for its financing.

First, do the thing in a small way and, if it is right and profitable to society, it will grow and the public will provide for it.

Here is a group of 10,000,000 alert, restless rural youth, starting out for themselves, breaking the bonds of authority and restraint, challenging the old order and its prohibitions, full of life, eager for movement and action, not yet settled as to a life partner or life work, highly emotional, responsive to patriotic appeal and worthy ideals. What a challenge to extension and to its staff of men and women with clear vision and wholesome minds - men and women with practical and technical knowledge and experience, with patriotic fervor and high ideals for service, who know how and have the ability to do and carry on! Shall we not enter this promising field of older rural youth in a still larger way and add honor and usefulness to the work we are now doing and contribute still further to the national welfare? We believe we should.



How Further May We Develop Our Rural Youth Work in the United States

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